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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 KATHMANDU 001377

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SUBJECT: WEEKLY NEPAL MEDIA REPORT: JULY 15 - 21, 2003

- STATE FOR NP, AC, PM
- STATE FOR IN/R/MR
- STATE FOR SA/INS, PM/CBM, PM/PRO
- STATE FOR SA/PPD

1. PEACE TALKS

-- Maoists close Kathmandu contact office: The Maoists have closed down the contact office in Kathmandu, open from April 10. The government is shocked with the Maoists' decision to close the Kathmandu contact office, but it "thinks" such a move will not affect the forthcoming peace talks, government talks-convenor Kamal Thapa told Nepalnews late Sunday evening. (Nepalnews.com, 7/20)

-- Government pledges full security to Maoist leaders once dialogue begins: The government today assured full security of the Maoist negotiating team and promised "safe passage" in the event of the peace talks failing. The government assurance came shortly after the Maoists declared that its negotiating leaders have gone underground and that its contact office in Kathmandu has been closed indefinitely. (Media reports, 7/21)

-- Security beefed up nation-wide: Security has been beefed up in the capital and in the western region of the country, following the Maoists' closure of their office in the capital. According to security sources, the security forces have assumed high alert after the Maoists started attacks on some incumbent and retired security personnel in recent days. (Major newspapers, 7/21)

-- EU ready to facilitate: The European Union (EU) is ready to facilitate the ongoing peace process between the government and the Maoists if both sides agree on its involvement, said Rudiger Wenk, chief of the delegation of the European Commission in Nepal. (government-owned "Rising Nepal," E/D, 7/20)

-- Government, Maoists ready to confront: The Maoists have gone underground and resumed abductions, extortion. The government has begun arresting Maoists. Both are preparing to confront. The RIM is formulating for a deadly war in Nepal. The Maoists have imported a large quantity of weapons. (centrist "Janasatta," V/W, 7/19)

-- Information Minister on peace talks: The government is fully committed to honor and implement all the decisions made jointly with the Maoists during the previous rounds of talks, Information Minister and government negotiator Kamal Thapa said. (Media reports, 7/19)

-- Maoists not to turn away from talks: The government-Maoists peace talks got narrowly saved from the brink of being broken off. Although the top level Maoist leadership concluded that there had been no significant achievements in the peace process until recently, it has decided not to break off the ceasefire. (centrist "Bimarsha," V/W, 7/18)

-- Talks likely to be broken off: All the leaders of the Maoist talks team are busy in the party's internal affairs. The government has violated the code of conducts. There is a strong possibility of the breaking off of the talks. (Pro-Maoist "Jana Dharana," V/W, 7/17)

-- Uncertainty over talks spurs security beef-up: The government has stepped up security throughout the country owing to the Maoists' "suspicious activities" - increased movement, arms accumulation and forceful extortion -- in the recent past. (pro-India "Himalayan Times," E/D, 7/16)

-- Maoist spokesperson has no knowledge of government letter for talks: Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara expressed his ignorance about the government's formal invitation for the third round of peace talks with the Maoists. Mahara's comment on the government's

formal invitation comes a day after the Minister for Information

on and Communication, who is also one of the government negotiating team members, sent a letter to Dr. Bhattarai inviting him to sit down for formal talks as soon as possible. (centrist "Kantipur," V/D, 7/15)

12. MAOIST ACTIVITIES

-- Armed Maoists attack police post: Some 50 armed-Maoists Sunday evening attacked a police post of Sugauli Customs Office in Parsa district, looting around a dozen weapons. (Nepalnews.com, 7/21)

-- Maoists bring in weapons: The Police Headquarters said that the Maoists had brought into the capital about five dozens of sophisticated weapons through various entry points of the Kathmandu Valley. The police said the Maoists were using sand-delivering rental trucks to transport the weapons. (centrist "Spacetime Dainik," V/D, 7/20)

-- Maoists resort to abduction: The Maoists have abducted people in at least nine districts, violating the ceasefire code of conduct. ("The Rising Nepal," 7/19)

-- Retired cop killed by Maoists for refusing donation: Maoists on Wednesday night killed a retired policeman at his home in Ilam district after he refused to donate them the foodstuff and cash amount they had demanded. (Major newspapers, 7/19)

-- Maoists' high command meeting begins: High command meeting of the Maoists began in the remote village of Thimori in the Surkhet-Jajarkot border area on Thursday. All central committee members, except Dr. Baburam Bhattarai and C.P. Gajurel, who are participating in the RIM meeting in India, are present in the meeting. The Maoist meeting is taking place amidst tight security. Maoist militia is deployed around 15 kilometers of Thimori and no one is allowed to enter or leave the village. (centrist "Nepalipatra," V/W, 7/18)

-- Maoists kill UML cadre: A group of Maoists allegedly thrashed to death a committee member of the CPN-UML of Rupandehi district. The rebels severely beat him on Thursday night while he was on his way home. (Media reports, 7/16)

-- RIM slams U.S. military activities in West Asia: The regional conference of the parties and organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) has denounced the "increasing military cooperation between the U.S. and the reactionary regimes of the region in the service of U.S. imperialist aggression and occupation in West Asia and elsewhere." RIM is the regional organization of different communist parties in the region including the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). ("The Himalayan Times," 7/15)

-- Maoists bring in weapons: Security sources have informed that the Maoists have imported weapons [from India] through various points of Kailali district at a time when they and the government are discussing the third round of peace talks. ("Kantipur," 7/15)

13. POLITICAL AFFAIRS

-- King-Maoists plotting against democracy: Koirala: Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala said that the king and the Maoists were jointly plotting against democracy. He claimed that the ongoing movement had weakened the plot to some extent. He asked the Maoists and the king to agree on some crucial points for progressive reforms. Koirala also said that the five agitating political parties would not give up their stance for reactivating the present constitution. (Leading dailies, 7/19)

-- Prime Minister toward fatal decision: As Prime Minister Thapa failed to bring political parties into the government, he is now moving toward restoring the dissolved parliament, a step that would once again push the country into darkness and prove lethal to Thapa himself. (rightist "Hindu," V/W, 7/17)

-- Squabbling in UML over: The protracted central committee meet of the UML ended Tuesday patching up the differences between the factions led by general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and standing committee

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member K. P. Oli. (Media reports, 7/16)

14. NEPAL-U.S.

-- Foreign Secretary leaves for U.S.: Foreign Se

cretary

Madhu Raman Acharya left Kathmandu (7/18) for Washington D.C. to hold talks with senior U.S. officials on bilateral relations and matters of mutual interest. Talking to reporters before his departure, Acharya said that he would hold discussions on several issues related to bilateral cooperation. "But the proposed Nepal Trade Bill for duty and quota free access to Nepali garments to the U.S. market will be on top of our agenda," said Acharya, who is accompanied by the president of Garments Association of Nepal. Acharya also gave indication that he would also discuss with the U.S. officials on Nepal's security situation and Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in it's a press release, has stated that the two sides would hold consultations on broad areas like development assistance, bilateral cooperation, Nepal's accession to WTO, and regional and international issues. (centrist "Kathmandu Post," E/D, and Kantipur, 7/19)

15. BUSINESS/ECONOMY

-- Nepal's WTO membership likely in September: Nepal's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) during the Cancun ministerial meet in September is almost certain, following a successful completion of a five-day bilateral negotiations in Geneva on Friday. ("The Kathmandu Post," 7/20)

-- New budget announced: Finance Minister Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani announced (7/17) a budget of 102.4 billion rupees (1.32 billion dollars) promulgated through a royal ordinance in the absence of a sitting parliament. He has reduced both security and royal household expenditures nominally". Five agitating parties Sunday (7/20) held the third "special session" of the already-dissolved House of Representatives, condemning the government budget for fiscal year 2003/04. (Media reports, 7/21)

16. BHUTANESE REFUGEES

-- Nepali citizenship forms for refugees: Bhutanese government said the Joint Verification Team (JVT) would start distributing applications for Nepali citizenship to those who fell under category II in the Khudunabari camp from the last week of August, a decision reached in the 14th ministerial meeting. Nepal, however, is confident that none of the refugees under category II would apply for Nepali citizenship. ("The Himalayan Times," 7/20)

-- Bhutanese assembly against refugee repatriation: Defying international pressure, the Bhutanese National Assembly adopted a defiance posture as most members opposed return of the 100,00-plus Bhutanese living in refugee camps in Nepal for more than a decade. ("The Kathmandu Post" and "Kantipur," 7/20)

-- EU urges international community to resolve refugee problem: Rudiger Wenk, chief of the delegation of the European Commission in Nepal urged the international community and Nepal to find a pragmatic and realistic solution to the 13-year-old Bhutanese refugee problem. (Compiled from major newspapers, 7/19)

-- UK expresses support for Bhutanese refugees: The United Kingdom has sent a letter to Bhutanese exiled leader Teknath Rizal in India, expressing support for the refugees staying in the camps in eastern Nepal, claimed the exiled human rights leader through a telephonic interview with "The Kathmandu Post" from India. ("The Kathmandu Post," 7/16)

-- Government to correct refugee verification report: The government is in a mood to rectify the widely criticized Bhutanese refugee verification report. The international community, including the U.S., had expressed severe disapproval over the report. (centrist "Rajdhani," V/D, 7/15)

17. OTHERS

-- UML against peace troops to Iraq: CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal said Sunday he and his

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party were against the government plan to send peace troops to Iraq. (Media reports, 7/20)

-- Unsolved inundation problem creates havoc: The inundation problem in four VDCs of Banke district, caused by India's unilateral construction of the Laxmanpur barrage and its embankment, has remained unresolved as officials of Nepal and India failed to

hold a crucial meeting to address it. (Feature article in the "Kathmandu Post," 7/16)

-- Iraq safe working place: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has given green signal to the Ministry of Labor and Transport Management for allowing Nepalis to go Iraq for employment. The Labor Ministry had requested the Foreign Ministry to decide whether Nepalis could be sent to Iraq as the U.S. armed force continued to face attacks. ("The Kathmandu Post" and "Kantipur," 7/15)

MALINOWSKI